



McGregor W. Scott

United States Attorney
Eastern District of California

Sacramento
501 I. Street, Ste 10-100
Sacramento CA 95814
Tel (916) 554-2700
TTY (916) 554-2855

NEWS RELEASE

Fresno
2500 Tulare St., Suite 4401
Fresno, CA 93721
Tel (559) 497-4000
TTY (559) 497-4500

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Contact: Karen Escobar, 559-497-4000

www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae

VALLEY-BASED GRENADINE BROTHERS **SENTENCED FOR COCAINE CONVOY**

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that WAYNE BRIZAN, 37, aka Cornelius JAMES, aka Mark BRIZAN, aka Anthony WILKINS, a citizen of Grenada residing in the Fort Lauderdale, Florida area was sentenced today to 11 years and 9 months in federal prison by U.S. District Judge Anthony W. Ishii in connection with a major cocaine distribution operation based in the Central Valley of California. Two weeks ago, WAYNE BRIZAN's brothers who are also originally from Grenada, PHILIP BRIZAN, 41, of Atwater, California, and JUDE BRIZAN, 42, also of Florida, were sentenced to 11 years and 7 years in prison, respectively, for their roles in the drug conspiracy. All will serve at least 85% of their sentences.

The Brizan brothers' convictions stemmed from a long-term Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation, dubbed Operation Cocaine Convoy, conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), California Department of Justice, Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE), and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), with the assistance of numerous state and local law enforcement agencies. During the investigation, agents seized approximately 38 kilograms, or about 77 pounds, of cocaine and nearly \$1.5 million in U.S. currency. In addition, forfeiture proceedings have been instituted with respect to three real properties which were used to facilitate drug transactions or which were purchased with the proceeds of drug trafficking.

According to court documents, SERGIO REYNOL PADILLA, aka Sergio Reynol Padilla-Gonzalez, 39, of Merced, and PHILIP and WAYNE BRIZAN headed a nationwide drug distribution conspiracy. For at least six years, PADILLA, a convicted drug felon and cocaine wholesaler, directed the shipment and distribution of large quantities of cocaine throughout the United States. Brothers WAYNE, PHILIP, and JUDE BRIZAN were responsible for coordinating and transporting large amounts of cocaine obtained from PADILLA to the East Coast, primarily the Philadelphia area where the cocaine was distributed to violent gang members. The brothers shipped the cocaine in semi-tractor trailers concealed in crates of agricultural produce. Both PHILIP and WAYNE BRIZAN owned trucking companies in California and Florida which were used to facilitate the transportation of drugs from California to the East Coast.

When PADILLA and members of his drug trafficking organization were arrested in February, 2006, the Brizan brothers turned to another source of supply in Los Angeles, HOWARD GORDON, JR., 30, of Los Angeles, California, who pled guilty on March 26, 2007, to attempted possession of cocaine with intent to distribute. GORDON is scheduled for sentencing before Judge Ishii on June 4.

On April 30, SERGIO PADILLA's wife, MONICA PADILLA, 29, pled guilty to violating currency transaction reporting (CTR) regulations, which require financial institutions to file a report of cash transactions in excess of \$10,000. She also agreed to the forfeiture of her residence, where she lived with SERGIO PADILLA, and an apartment complex which was purchased with drug proceeds. Her sentencing is scheduled for July 9.

Other associates of SERGIO PADILLA who have entered guilty pleas include the following: GILBERT FRANKLIN, 32, of Merced, has pled guilty to drug offenses which carry a maximum term of 8 years and agreed that he would not seek a sentence of less than 8 years. GERARDO VARGAS GALICIA, 37, an illegal alien of Mexico, residing in Merced, entered a guilty plea to an immigration violation and is scheduled for deportation to Mexico.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen Escobar, who is prosecuting the case, SERGIO PADILLA and the remaining four defendants -- LORENA PEREZ, 37, TRINIDAD ANGULO, 39, of Madera, FRANCESKA BRIZAN, 37, of Atwater, and DAMON GUNN, 31, of Turlock -- continue to assert their innocence. A trial date has been set before U.S. District Judge Ishii for October 30.

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